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SOUTH ASIA
A PROPOSAL FOR U S POLICY

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5604 - THE GEOSTRATEGIC CONTEXT
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1

The United States has important, but not vital, interests in South Asia. These relate to (1) nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles, (2) regional stability, and (3) economic development. The long standing dispute over Kashmir and the possibility of conventional war as well as nuclear conflict, while not directly affecting U.S. territory, are key causes of concern. On the other hand, if conflict can be avoided and economic development spurred, the United States stands to gain. While there are important transnational issues in the region, including population growth, water resources, environmental degradation, and drugs, the South Asia team does not believe that they are likely to affect U.S. security interests in the next decade. Regarding population growth, the team believes that economic development is interrelated with population growth and should be viewed in that context.

The Nuclear Issue

From a U.S. perspective, the existence of nuclear weapons capability and the possibility of a nuclear exchange between India and Pakistan is the most important issue in the region. Both India and Pakistan have at least the capability to assemble a nuclear weapon in a relatively short period of time and, while they claim that they have not actually assembled weapons, it is possible that they have in fact done so. As was demonstrated in the case of Iraq's nuclear capability, U.S. intelligence on Iraq's program was substantially behind actual developments. In several 1995 testimonies before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, the Assistant Secretary of State for South Asian Affairs noted that although a major conflict is unlikely in the present circumstances, this is

the one area of the world with the potential for a nuclear exchange between regional states. In fact, India and Pakistan went to the brink of a nuclear exchange in 1990.

The United States would ideally like to see all nations sign and adhere to the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT). In South Asia, the United States seeks to cap and over time reduce and ultimately eliminate weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missile delivery systems. However, India and Pakistan view their nuclear weapons programs as necessary to protect their vital national security interests. Both nations also believe the NPT to be discriminatory because it does not call for the elimination of all nations' nuclear weapons and does not provide security guarantees.

India and Pakistan do not share the U.S. concern over the possibility of a nuclear exchange between their countries. A former chairman of India's Atomic Energy Commission wrote in the January/February 1995 issue of *Foreign Affairs* that both countries exhibited considerable restraint in their three wars since independence in avoiding civilian targets and in India's not pushing its 1971 military advantage in the heartland or disputed territory. In addition, the author notes that a strategy of "nuclear realism" has given rise to bilateral confidence-building measures, including a mutual agreement not to attack each other's nuclear installations.

The Strategic Context

India's and Pakistan's nuclear weapons program must be viewed within the South Asian strategic context. This first involves examining China's place in the region. While China is traditionally viewed in an East Asian context, it shares a common border with a number of states in the region, including India. In 1962, China and India fought a border

war in the Himalayas While unrelated to the border war, during which it defeated Indian military forces, in 1964 China first tested a nuclear weapon, demonstrating to the world that it had developed a nuclear capability

In response to China's development of a nuclear capability, India pursued a nuclear weapons development program Unlike Iraq, which developed its nuclear weapons program in secret, India engaged in a national debate over the "nuclear option". Almost all Indian political parties have supported a nuclear option strategy, which at present is satisfied with the capability to assemble nuclear weapons, but does not foreclose the manufacture and deployment of weapons according to a 1994 Asia Society report on nuclear proliferation in South Asia

Pakistan responded to India's detonation of a nuclear device in 1974 as well as its 1971 defeat in the third Indo-Pakistani war since independence with its own nuclear weapons development program As in India, Pakistan's nuclear weapons program enjoys strong public support While Pakistan has not detonated a nuclear weapon it is assumed to have achieved nuclear capability

Proposed U.S. Policy Objectives

While the United States should continue to urge adherence to the NPT it is not realistic to expect India and Pakistan to give up their nuclear weapons programs This is because (1) both countries view these programs as vital to their national security and (2) the programs enjoy strong domestic support To persuade India and Pakistan to consider denuclearizing, the underlying regional instability, which is discussed next, would have to be resolved, and, for India, an accommodation would have to be reached with China

Without resolution of these critical external security issues, domestic opinion in both countries would not be likely to accept forgoing the nuclear option

If denuclearization is not an option, then the next best choice is to support efforts by both India and Pakistan to cap their nuclear weapons programs by forgoing further production of fissile materials and weapons production. This effort should extend to capping their ballistic missile programs, which only further heighten instability. As discussed above, however, the nuclear issue is closely linked with regional stability and one cannot be resolved without the other.

Finally, the United States can also use its intelligence capabilities to prevent inadvertent war. Neither India nor Pakistan have visibility of the other's nuclear weapons programs. In a crisis, this lack of intelligence can lead to miscalculations and misunderstandings. As it did in the 1990 crisis between the two countries, U.S. intelligence sharing can inform both countries of the strategic situation at least as it relates to the status of nuclear forces.

The principal policy tool available to the United States is diplomacy. There are few sticks and carrots available. The United States seeks to inhibit exports of goods and technology that can contribute to nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles to both countries. However, export controls and trade sanctions have not been very effective in the past. In addition, as the Asia Society notes, current U.S. law restricts the U.S. ability to constrain India's and Pakistan's programs. Under the Pressler Amendment, U.S. military and economic assistance to Pakistan is broadly constrained. India has considerable indigenous capability to support its nuclear and missile program. Finally, even if the United States

wished to provide financial and military aid in return for concessions on nuclear and missile programs, resource constraints limit the capability to do so

Regional Stability

Kashmir appears to be the salient issue that hinders progress between India and Pakistan as a whole. Solve the Kashmir problem and much of the rest begins to fall into place. The nature of both countries' security, economic and political development issues is tied in some way to Kashmir. If for no other reason, the energy and resources focused into the dispute could be better used toward improvements in economic, political and social growth. Thus, the second priority objective for U.S. policy toward the region must be to devise a diplomatic solution to the disputed territory. Much like the Middle East peace process and settlement efforts in Bosnia, Kashmir has become extremely complex over time. As such, it will take a sustained, patient and imaginative effort to resolve. However, while the U.S. has been a long-standing and stalwart participant in the Middle East peace process, progress has been measured in decades. On the other hand, the late but hasty U.S. involvement in Bosnia has proven the old adage of "look before you leap" to be prudent advice. Kashmir may be an opportunity for the U.S. to navigate a course between the two extremes exemplified by these other problematic areas.

Like the "Hatfields and the McCoys", the Kashmir dispute perpetuates and complicates with each new maneuver or confrontation by the involved parties. Recent outbreaks of violence in the region have occurred based on reasons that have, to a large extent, eclipsed the original *cause belli*. As James Clad noted in a speech recorded by Asian Affairs, An American Review in the Spring of 1995, "everyone in India and Pakistan

knows, and will say so after two whiskeys, that both governments have strained their military-civilian ties, and invested too much effort, too many resources, and too much brain power in this sterile dispute ”¹ These strained ties within each country are exactly what need mending in order for each, and the region as a whole, to develop toward full potential

The Strategic Context

To expend any energy attempting to justify either India or Pakistan as the original transgressor with respect to Kashmir is to waste effort towards a solution Historically, both nations, upon gaining independence, sought to take advantage of circumstances India’s 1947 claim to the territory, based on imperial statute and “words spoken over his shoulder” by the fleeing maharaja, is no better an argument than the one Pakistan makes by justifying their occupation as being on behalf of a majority of Kashmiri Muslims whose collective voice was never properly heard upon partition Strategically, Kashmir is the place where two nuclear armed forces confront one another This provides all the rationale Pakistan needs to maintain its level of security It also allows India to distort her security needs by posing herself as a country trapped between adversaries ²

The U N resolutions of 1948 and 1949, to which both countries agreed, and the 1972 Simla Agreement, calling for a final settlement and which resulted in a cease-fire, are

¹ James Clad, *An American Perspective I, Asian Affairs -An American Review* Volume 22, Number 1, (Contemporary U S -Asia Research Institute, New York, Spring 1995), page 14

² Zamir Akram, *A Pakistani Perspective, Asian Affairs-An American Review*, Volume 22, Number 1, (Contemporary U S -Asian research Institute, New York, Spring 1995) page 56 India argues that its nuclear capability is designed to provide security against China In practice, the bulk of India’s army is arrayed near or involved in Kashmir In an area roughly seventy by forty miles, India maintains 600,000 troops, not including police forces Compare this to the Soviet Union’s use of less than 200,000 troops at the height of the Afghanistan war Additionally, India’s nuclear inclinations over time have been demonstrated astensisons with Pakistan have ebbed and flowed much more so than with China

often touted as reference points for settlement. However, both sides' successful attempts to circumvent, rationalize and posture over these accords makes them faint marks on the wall for future negotiations. Consequently, the strategic context is one in which both sides have been disingenuous. Add to this forty years of Cold War maneuvering that placed Pakistan in the West's camp and India in the Soviet's camp, and the U S is not readily viewed (by at least one side) as an honest broker. The negotiating field is not only trashed with unimplemented settlements, but also by failed attempts to erase Cold War tensions ³

Proposed U S Policy Objective

The United States must seek to broker a negotiated settlement. Obviously, with all the baggage the dispute carries, this will be difficult. So as not to be lost in all of what has already been said, the self determination of the Kashmiri people themselves must be noted as yet another consideration. To the extent that the confrontation has not threatened a nuclear exchange, the U S has been content to direct its diplomatic energies to other ventures in other parts of the world. Had we used this time as interested spectators, the task of now injecting ourselves as diplomatic advisers would be easier. However, as already noted, we have not followed the play closely. This is no time to go it alone. We will not be credible referees. A world representative negotiating team should be formed through U.S. leadership and we should be content to remain in the wings. While Pakistan has already accepted this type of forum, India must be made to abandon its insistence on bilateral resolution. This will not happen because of wishing or reasoning alone. It will occur when these urges meet with opportunity. Such an opportunity

³ We refer here to the Pressler Amendment where F-16 fighters were withheld from Pakistan, after payment was received, as a display of disapproval of Pakistan's actions

occurred, but was missed, in 1990-1991 when both countries were on the brink of a nuclear exchange at the same time both suffered from a balance of payments crisis ⁴

Perhaps the best opportunity will occur with an appropriate change in India's government

Since democracy is rooted in both countries, but especially so in India, the democratic process should foster this chance. The U S should, therefore, elevate its situational awareness toward the region as a first step in leadership, so as to foresee the moment and prepare to react. The baggage of forty years and numerous conflicts must be set aside as the foundation of negotiations and, in essence, a clean slate started on which to negotiate grievances

Economic Development

South Asia, with a population of about 1.5 billion, is one of the world's last economic frontiers. India and Pakistan have had rates of economic growth that have lagged behind those of other major Asian nations. Coupled with high rates of population growth both countries have significant portions of their population living in poverty. According to the world bank, in 1990 almost 450 million people, more than half of India's population lived in absolute poverty. In 1992 it was estimated that 28 percent of Pakistan's population lived at or below the poverty level, where the poverty level was described as sufficient to meet minimal needs ⁵

Strategic Context

India for most of its time as an independent state had a centrally planned, tightly controlled economy. According to author Jim Rohwer in his book Asia Rising, in 1991 it

⁴ Clad, page 12

⁵ Peter R. Blood, Pakistan, A Country Study, (Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, Sixth Edition. Washington D C, April 1994), page 150

had the most comprehensively regulated and isolated economy outside the Soviet bloc. As a result the business community avoided India. Its economic system was built on a high degree of government ownership of industry, heavy regulation of privately owned industrial businesses, and the limitation of foreign trade and investment. Heavy government regulation resulted in competition for government largesse, which in turn generated systemic corruption.

In response to a 1991 financial crisis, India has taken a number of steps to deregulate its economy. However, a number of roadblocks to economic liberalization remain. These include the lack of liberalization by the individual states that comprise India, which must grant licenses necessary for businesses to operate, such as for sewage and telephone lines, and the central government's unwillingness to countenance job losses in both the public and private sectors. Nevertheless, trade with and investment in India has increased dramatically since reform began, with the United States India's largest trading partner and foreign investor. Whether the reforms will fully take hold and spur greater economic growth remains to be seen.

Pakistan's economic development history can be characterized as lurching toward a market economy over the last half century. It began under difficult circumstances in 1947 when independence came. At the time, Pakistan was largely an agrarian economy scraping out a meager existence. It was devoid of industry. Despite these tough circumstances, it achieved economic expansion over the past several decades, adding industry and services and expanding agriculture. This expansion, however, was largely induced by outside aid, particularly from the United States, which saw Pakistan in terms of a front-line ally in the

Cold War containment strategy Pakistan's military derived significant benefit from this aid, but at the expense of the general populace This fact, coupled with the same types of corruption already noted within India's system, resulted in inequitable income distribution This is a problem that persists today Pakistan also has always been, and remains today, a debtor nation

The "politics of personalities", where vested interests are the rule, versus a politics of issues, where people's needs are paramount, ensured that economic growth remained shallow As Pakistan's governments have frequently been punctuated by military leadership amid a see-sawing between the Pakistani Peoples Party (PPP) and the Pakistani Muslim League (PML) political parties, one begins to see the fits and starts Pakistan's economy has endured Add to this scenario an innovation toward "Islamization" of the economy in the late 1970's and the picture looks worse yet.⁶ Consequently, this unusual strain of capitalism, market economics, religion, home grown in a tenuous democratic soil, has produced a hybrid system whose parts are frequently out of synch Yet, the potential for the system is palpable

Proposed U S Policy Objectives

The United States has much to gain from South Asian economic development given the needs of India and Pakistan in areas such as infrastructure and consumer demand Economic development can also do much to help address some of India's and Pakistan's most pressing problems, including population growth, food security and

⁶ Ibid, page 157 Islamization was initiated by General Zia and represented a desire to apply rules of Islam to govern economic policy and practices

poverty⁷ The heavy lifting of development, however, must come from internal efforts to adopt economic policies that promote the trade and investment that spur growth To support growth the United States should (1) advocate a level playing field that encourages trade and investment for all nations, (2) encourage policy changes that promote free markets, and (3) bring favorable policy changes that can spur development to the business community's attention as part of private sector boosterism

As was the case on nuclear and regional stability issues and for the reasons described above concerning economic development, U S policy tools are limited U.S use of soft power--advocacy of the kinds of policies that promote market economies and private sector encouragement to engage with the countries of the region--can help demonstrate to these countries the need for change Technology transfer separate from that needed for nuclear weapons and ballistic missile programs can help the region's economies modernize Finally, in whatever assistance and encouragement is provided, U S policymakers should avoid tilting to any one country so as not to upset efforts to bolster regional security

Summary

The U S ability to influence events in South Asia is limited by a variety of factors The most important factor is that the United States is not a direct player Rather, the United States, while an interested party whose interests can benefit or be adversely affected by events, is on the periphery As such the tools it has available to affect events

⁷ Food security has not been discussed in this report because it was not judged to be one of the major issues facing the subcontinent in the next 10 years India has been self-sufficient in food production recently, but is utilizing almost all its arable land In another 25-30 years if economic development does not provide India with the wealth to fund food imports or further increase domestic production, food security could be a critical issue

are generally limited to diplomacy, soft power such as the example of the benefits of a market economy, and limited aspects of its military power--principally intelligence sharing

While there is a congruence of interests in regional stability and economic development, views on the nuclear issue are widely divergent India and Pakistan view nuclear power as essential to their national security Their people and political parties favor nuclear capability The United States, on the other hand, believes that nuclear proliferation is dangerous and that the use of nuclear weapons is totally unacceptable However, until underlying security concerns involving India and Pakistan on the one hand and India and China on the other, are resolved, little progress can be expected on the nuclear issue

The most significant obstacles to progress on regional stability and economic development is internal instability The ability of India and Pakistan to make the difficult choices necessary to resolve the dispute over Kashmir and spur greater economic development will antagonize key constituencies

Over the next decade India and Pakistan are likely to muddle through their disputes, with continued tensions over Kashmir, but no settlement and no open warfare Economic development is likely to improve, but not to the extent possible because of suboptimization within economic policy and the social structure--the caste system in India and the economic effects of Islamic law in Pakistan The best possible outcome would be a resolution of regional disputes and strong economic growth The worst outcome would be a fourth Indo-Pakistani war and internal chaos resulting from the failure of economic development

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REPLY TO
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